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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: YUSHCHENKO POISONING REMAINS IN
POLITICAL MIX

REF: A. KYIV 1064
[1](#)B. KYIV 1052

Classified By: Charge for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. President Yushchenko,s 2004 poisoning has resurfaced as a major issue being examined both at the Prosecutor General,s Office (PGO) and in the press, with many seeing the Presidential apparatus working the issue as a potential vote getter in the upcoming presidential campaign. On July 16, Russian officials announced to the PGO that they would not extradite former Deputy Head of the SBU Volodymyr Satsyuk, widely rumored to be one of the main suspects in the poisoning case. Yushchenko for the first time on July 24 publicly accused David Zhvaniya, one of his former "dear friends" and godfather to his youngest son, of direct involvement in the poisoning plot, a claim that was then echoed by PGO representatives. Zhvaniya, whom the PGO brought in for questioning on July 23 after a dramatic public summons, continues to suggest that Yushchenko was never poisoned and he himself is embroiled in a battle over his right to Ukrainian citizenship. Yushchenko, his post-poisoning lead doctor Olha Bohomolets, and prominent journalist Serhiy Leshchenko also spent multiple hours at the PGO on various dates in June and July to provide testimony. Despite the recent uptick in activity at the PGO and Yushchenko,s continual foreshadowing that he knows who the perpetrator is, there has been no indication that the PGO will formally announce its suspect(s) anytime soon.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment. Russia,s refusal to extradite Satsyuk is probably only partially responsible for the PGO,s sudden resurgence in its efforts to complete the investigation. The recent PGO actions are seen by many as another indication of the office's increasingly open pro-presidential stance. The reemergence of this issue, which has seen an ebb-and-flow in interest over the years, may well be an attempt by Yushchenko to remind the public of the dramatic fate he suffered as he led the Orange Revolution -- and gain support for the upcoming 2009/2010 presidential election. However, given the passage of time and barring a truly stunning revelation (increasingly unlikely after four years), this issue doesn't look to figure strongly in the upcoming contest. End Summary and Comment.

Satsyuk: Staying Put in Russia

[1](#)3. (U) The Russian Prosecutor General,s Office notified the Ukrainian PGO on July 16 of its decision not to extradite Satsyuk, widely rumored to be one of the main suspects in the poisoning case, on the basis that he holds Russian citizenship in addition to his Ukrainian citizenship. In an interview with Ukrayinska Pravda (UP) published on July 7, Zhvaniya detailed Satsyuk,s association with Yushchenko and financial support to his electoral campaign in 2004. Another lengthy interview published on August 11 and 12 in UP with

Yevgeniy Chervonenko, head of Yushchenko's security detail at the time of his poisoning, reinforced the notion of Satsyuk's guilt and insinuated Satsyuk more likely took orders from the Russian "criminal world" than from the GOR.

Zhvaniya: Irking the Investigation, Pleading International Assistance

¶4. (SBU) Ten members of the PGO presented Zhvaniya a highly-publicised summons at Kyiv's airport on July 16, as he was seeing his family off on vacation. The summons was for a July 23 interview at PGO headquarters for questioning related to Yushchenko's poisoning at the PGO. (Comment: The drama and media coverage of the summons underscores the ongoing public battle between Zhvaniya and forces allied with the President. The fact that Zhvaniya remained in Ukraine has led to speculation that questions over whether he obtained his citizenship through fraudulent means preclude his entering and exiting Ukraine. End Comment.) Zhvaniya subsequently announced that he would only be willing to meet with Halyna Klymovych, the PGO's head investigator in the poisoning case; when he was denied this meeting upon arrival at the PGO, he claimed parliamentary immunity and left the building immediately. He has also launched a public campaign attempting to show the Ukrainian government as violating his human rights and subjecting him to political persecution. He has made requests to present his case at various European parliaments -- including France, Italy and Belgium. on this alleged violation of his human rights and political persecution. So far, none of the parliaments has agreed to his request.

High-Profile Interrogations at the PGO, Media Interviews

¶5. (SBU) Political analyst Viktor Nebozhenko told poloffs on August 14 that the resurgence of the poisoning issue was an attempt on the part of Yushchenko, whose popularity ratings remain under 10 percent, to gain voters, attention and sympathy as campaigning for the presidential 2009/2010 election gets underway. The President, who has been voicing support for the PGO and the diligence of its investigation, appeared for lengthy questioning sessions himself on July 22 and 28. His increasingly estranged Rada bloc partner, Interior Minister Lutsenko, publicly accused Yushchenko's Secretariat of using the poisoning issue as a campaign tactic and of interfering in the investigation by dragging Zhvaniya--who bankrolls Lutsenko's People's Self Defense party--back to the PGO. Lutsenko also accused the PGO of acting prematurely by naming Zhvaniya as a possible conspirator. Perhaps as a counterattack, Chervonenko's interview not only assigns blame to Zhvaniya but also accuses him of attempting to talk Yushchenko out of going abroad for treatment when his illness became apparent the day after the dinner at Satsyuk's dacha.

¶6. (SBU) Dermatologist Olha Bohomolets, the Ukrainian member brought onto Yushchenko's medical team at the time of his poisoning, was brought into the PGO for a half day of questioning on June 9 and went on to give her first public interview on the poisoning to UP, published on July 16 and ¶17. She agreed that it was curious that the PGO took so long to call for her testimony, but declined to release any details from the interrogation, citing PGO-mandated confidentiality. Much of the interview centered on a graphic description of the President's treatment--with an emphasis on his will to persevere--starting from the time of the poisoning, and could be read as an attempt to regain sympathy for the incumbent presidential candidate. Likewise, Chervonenko, head of Yushchenko's security detail at the time of the poisoning, gave special emphasis on Yushchenko's valor in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds and a constant strength that carries through today. Both Bohomolets and Chervonenko answered questions to directly refute Zhvaniya's claims that Yushchenko was not poisoned but rather suffered food poisoning, pancreatitis, or some other less sensational illness. Yushchenko's influence over the timing and content of these two lengthy interviews is notably clear; Bohomolets "received permission" from the President to tell her story,

and the Secretariat reviewed the contents of Chervonenko's interview before publication.

¶7. (U) The PGO used force to bring Serhiy Leshchenko, a prominent UP journalist, in for seven hours of questioning on July 14; details have not been released, but Leshchenko's colleagues speculate the questioning was related to his interview with Zhvaniya in early July regarding Zhvaniya's relationship with Yushchenko and the events leading up to and including the dinner at Satsyuk's dacha.

¶8. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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